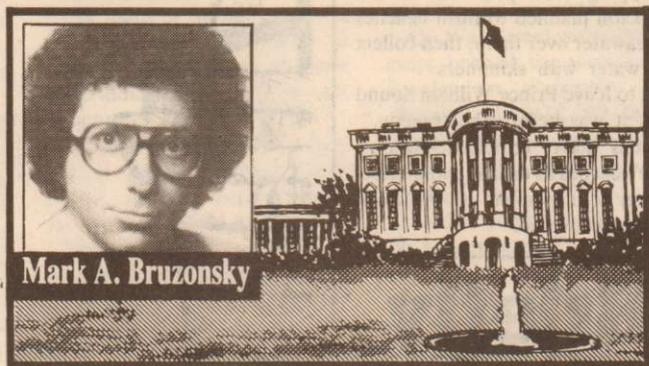


# From



Mark A. Bruzonsky

# Washington

# Transcript

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# to appear

**N**EARLY a year ago, on April 26, 1988, the first and only congressional hearing about the Intifada was held in Hearing Room 1310 of the Longworth House Office Building on Capitol Hill.

Actually it wasn't an "official" hearing — rather amazingly there hasn't been to this date an "official hearing" by any standing committee of the American Congress which yearly provides Israel the billions of dollars which are crucial to Israel's ability to continue controlling the occupied territories and putting down the Intifada.

Rather the hearing last April was a day of fact-finding and testifying arranged by the Congressional Black Caucus, an organisation that links the Black members of the House of Representatives. The CBC was able to use a regular hearing room, and the proceedings were conducted just as a regular congressional hearing would have been. But still the gathering had no official nature as far as the rest of the Congress or official Washington was concerned.

The reasons for this situation are well-known, of course, though increasingly difficult to justify. Congress remains hostage to the infamous "Jewish lobby." And though privately there is much frustration, lots of grumbling, and in some quarters even considerable hostility toward "the lobby" the situation remains one in which Congress is effectively paralysed in regard to Mid-east policies affecting Israel.

After so many years of heavy-handed arm-twisting and various forms of political blackmail and lots of political money giving, all designed to keep Congress firmly in Israel's pocket, resentment has grown, of course. But not to the point that anyone is ready to directly challenge "the lobby". After all, everyone remembers that those who did in the past — going back to Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, William Fulbright, and in more recent years another chairman of that prestigious committee, Charles Percy, as well as Congressmen Paul Findley and Pete McCloskey — are all gone from the Washington scene thanks to "the lobby".

So no one other than the CBC has had the guts, or the moral decency, to even begin to investigate and publicise what is happening to the Palestinians in the areas occupied by America's top client state for nearly 22 years. And even the CBC has been very hesitant and circumspect, as dramatised by the very lengthy and extended time it has taken to even get the hearing transcript into print.

Indeed, on that day last April only

three of the 23 members of the CBC were courageous enough even to appear in the Hearing Room during any part of the day-long session. And one of the three, Congressman Ronald Dellums, only came for a few moments at lunch time.

The two congressmen who were in attendance most of the time, and the ones who in fact decided the hearing should be held, were congressman George Crockett and Congressman Mervyn Dymally, CBC chairman and vice-chairman respectively. In each case their aides were instrumental in making arrangements for the hearing — Cheri Waters, a young Black woman who use to work for Trans-Africa, for Crockett; and Marwan Burgan, a young Palestinian-American, for Dymally.

The hearing itself actually was quite interesting and it certainly was very timely coming after a few months of shocking pictures on American news programmes that brought into American homes the reality of the Palestinian suffering at the hands of the Israeli army. In fact, the hearing was so much of interest that C-Span television broadcast the entire day of testimony and questions-gavel-to-gavel on Cable television.

The CBC had done its homework and gone to the trouble and expense of inviting former Israeli General Matti Peled to come from Israel and Palestinian human rights activist Roger Shehada to come from Ramallah on the West Bank. Palestinian scholar Edward Said was there, as were other academics and human rights representatives. The Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), sent its President Abdeen Jabara who aroused considerable interest as he held up for the cameras gruesome photos of Palestinians who had been injured.

The situation with American Jews was confused. Originally invited were the executive director of the powerful Jewish lobby, Tom Dine, along with journalist Leonard Fine, a "liberal" critic of Israeli policy but nevertheless a loyal member in good standing of the American Jewish establishment whose positions usually mirror those of the "doves" in Israel's Labour Party.

But neither of these two persons did appear. Instead, called to the witness table was Henry Schwarschild representing a new organisation known as the Jewish Committee on the Middle East [JCOME], a coalition of American Jews that had quickly come together, provoked by the Intifada, to call for a basic change in American policy toward Israel including major reductions of aid.

Schwarschild, who works at the

American Civil Liberties Union [Aclu] directing a programme against the death penalty, had the stage to himself when it came to American Jewry. For when Dine and Fine found out that a spokesperson for JCOME was invited they tried to pressure the congressional staff persons to retract the invitation. But the pressure failed largely thanks to the steadfastness of Crockett and Dymally and their assistants. Fine actually called again the morning of the hearing to say that if the JCOME representative was allowed to testify he would not. And so he didn't. Dine decided in the end to send his prepared testimony but did not appear in person.

But even the CBC found itself unable, and apparently unwilling, to do very much after the day-long hearing. First came problems in getting the transcript published — something that could have been very important at the time had it been widely distributed to other members of Congress.

Because the CBC is an unofficial group there is no money from Congress for printing hearing records. Consequently the CBC Foundation, a non-profit organisation which works in co-ordination with the CBC, agreed to undertake that task. But then came one delay after another reflecting dissension within the CBC itself and reluctance, by some, to get further out front regarding the Intifada and opposition to Israel.

After many months of delays some of the groups who had testified were not happy that the hearing record wasn't available and began inquiring and then pressuring in their own ways. Still, no transcript was published, and a series of excuses were made by CBC staff persons and CBC Foundation officials.

By November of last year everyone was, of course, concentrating on the election. And after the election, Congressman Dymally was said to be concerned that nothing be done to lessen his own chances of taking over a committee chairman assignment that he wanted. Hence, no progress on the hearing record from November through February.

Meanwhile, much has happened in the Mid-east and the Intifada is more alive than ever even though in Washington it's not much in the news anymore. Any way, whatever the reasons for all the delays the CBC's Hearing Record is about to appear though it seems unlikely there is going to be much notice.

Furthermore, there doesn't seem to be any planning for another CBC Hearing, even though its needed more now than ever.